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SUBJECT: HCMC PROTESTANT CHURCH TO ADD OVER 180 PASTORS TO ITS ROLLS

¶1. (SBU) On October 31, ConGenOffs attended the first graduation ceremony for the Southern Evangelical Church of Vietnam (SECV) since the GVN recognized the organization in 2001. A total of 219 students received various religious degrees, including BAs in Theology. The SECV will ordain 183 of these students as pastors by early 2007. The new pastors include 106 students from the Central Highlands: 14 from Gia Lai, 26 from Dak Lak, 26 from Dak Nong, and 40 from Lam Dong. Many of these students had attended theological courses in the Central Highlands facilitated by their respective provincial governments since ¶2005. SECV officials told us that the graduates would return to their respective Central Highlands provinces and be deployed to newly recognized churches or to churches in the process of recognition under Vietnam's legal framework on religion.

¶2. (SBU) Comment: SECV leaders have explained that they have an internal requirement that fully-operational, recognized congregations should be headed by an ordained pastor. A shortage of trained personnel has hindered the process of recognition of SECV churches in the Central Highlands. The newly-graduated students should help continue the positive trend of SECV church recognitions in the Central Highlands in 2007.
End Comment.

WINNICK